

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MEETING

October 2, 2003

Members Present: Elizabeth Massey, Sara Wolff, Jeanne Haggerty, Janice Denton, Frank Lattuca, Al Byam, Elsie Fetterman

Absent: Hank Peirce, Doris Mundo

Staff: John Clobridge, Nancy Pagano, Barbara Slovin

Minutes: Minutes of 9/11 approved with addition that Jeanne and Sara will take turns chairing meetings. Minutes of 9/25 approved with no changes.

Senior Trust:

- VOTED TO reimburse the Senior Center Club for scholarships given for a total of \$405.
- Sara reminded members about the decision to have a Senior Trust meeting every other month alternating with the regular C.O.A. meeting. Sara suggested having the November meeting be a regular COA meeting and devoting half of the December meeting to the Senior Trust. Elsie said that the staff has put together a lot of background information that COA members should read in advance of this meeting. Consideration of the March 6th staff memo on use of Senior Trust monies (comparing it to existing policy) should be an agenda item.

Staff Reports

John

There are an unusual number of staff changes to report. Maureen retires 12/1, but is expected to be out on sick leave for a month or more after her surgery next week. John explained that her position was cut to half-time this fiscal year and that, because she has chosen to work full-time since July 1st, the position will be without funding mid-year. Barbara Slovin has opted to reduce her work week from four to three days effective this month. Maura has increased her work week from four to five days. Two days she's covering the Senior Center as Social Worker when Barbara isn't working, and the other three days she is funded by Congregate money and Disability Access Funds. Barbara Taylor is now working 24 hours a week. She had been working 20. John is now "full time Senior Center Director" as of July 1st.

The question of how the S.C. will cope w/o a secretary was asked. John said that most tasks will be taken care of internally by existing staff, however the Health Dept and LSSE secretaries can help on occasion. Sara suggested using Tax Work-Off volunteers. She suggested that Barbara advertise this in The Senior Spirit when the next period begins. The S.C. has had help from a few of this program's participants in the past at the hostess desk and in the hot lunch program. Barbara said that some Tax Work-Off participants opt to continue volunteering even after they complete the hours allotted. Resident homeowners in Amherst 60 years and older, who have an annual adjusted gross income of \$30,000 or less, are eligible to work off up to \$500 in property taxes a year at the rate of \$6.75 an hour. Seventeen people signed up in the current tax year and 15 will complete the hours allowed. Elsie said that COA members should let people know about this program. She spoke of an impressive Highland Valley-funded outreach program in Hadley where all elders from the oldest down are being visited. She said HVES has funded over 40 grants.

John said that Doris Mundo has not sent in her official resignation letter. Sara has called Doris and left a message, but she hasn't called her back. Town policy is that after three unexcused absences, it can be assumed membership is no longer wanted. Elsie asked, if the early meeting time was the only impediment, whether the meeting time could be changed. Sara said the Leadership Team has discussed the meeting time issue at length, and come to the conclusion that evening meetings are disliked by staff and COA members. Sara said that once it is established that Doris is officially no longer a member, the COA needs to look for a replacement.

Barbara Slovin suggested looking for someone with grant writing skills.

Barbara

Barbara announced that she and Maura have a new volunteer, Sue Reamer, who wants to start a peer counseling program through our Senior Center. Sue, 61, has a doctorate and nursing degree and a lot of energy and expertise.

Twenty-six low income van users, who have been financially stretched to the max, have benefited from the Florence Bank grant. The Town has been terrific in working with the Senior Center to help out those in need. Jeanne told a story about how a senior gave a van driver two tickets anticipating that that driver would be the one to take her home. A problem occurred when that driver did not drive the return trip and didn't have knowledge of the ticket already given to the other driver. Drivers should not accept more than the one ticket they are entitled to. Elsie asked if ridership is down and Al answered that van use has gone down significantly since prices have gone up. Barbara is working with Nancy Maglione and John on looking into developing an annual pass for residents. Barbara said that it is a difficult and unfair position to ask our staff to make some of the judgment calls about who should get subsidies and who shouldn't. Frank said it would be useful for fundraising to know how many people get the subsidies and how much money is needed. Barbara explained that the Town pays \$30 for a book of van tickets and sells that book to elder and disabled residents for \$20. Elsie said that elders don't want "handouts". Frank asked if merchants could be approached to be sponsors and Al pointed out that Big Y and Stop and Shop have contributed.

Committees

- **Wellness.** Will be meeting again October 15th at 2 PM.
- **Transportation.** Met September 16th to prepare for 9/25 Special COA Meeting about the van. At this meeting the committee looked at the add on options and broke these down into categories entitled, safety, comfort and essentials. The vendor brought a sample van over for examination on 9/29. Jeanne said the tiedowns were great and that the 36" door can easily accommodate walkers.
Discussion about alternative transportation program. There is a Medicaid program that provides free transportation dispatched out of Fitchburg. Barbara recommends that people use the regular van service and not the Medicaid van service because it costs the state a lot of money. There is more of a guarantee that people will actually get the ride with less hassle with the PVTa \$1 a ride service. Barbara feels that the only time when the Medicaid ride might be helpful is when the destination is out of the PVTa area. Sara said this should be on the Transportation Committee agenda for a future meeting. Al said that when we have collected enough data, the COA should write to the state about their concerns.

Highland Valley Elder Services Presentation

HVES Director Robert Gallant explained that HVES is a non-profit entity created by the state government funneling funds to 24 communities largely through partnerships with COAs. With him was Amanda Stiles, Case Manager for Amherst, and Jane Diamond, Associate Director of Community Programming.

Robert outlined how far HVES has come in its program called, "Caring Community Development", which is a two year old program which seeks to computerize area services and client needs through data entry so that these will be linked better. This process is called "mapping".

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Hirsh Pagano